

Back Again, Back Again: In Starlight, Part One

[**FX:** voices chatter in the background. Music begins, a simple repeating pattern, bright and cheery. It is "Nightingales" by Pierce Murphy.]

Abigail, as the intro: Back Again, Back Again, episode fifteen: In Starlight.

[**FX:** Music fades out. A click of a cassette tape-style recorder turns on, and the machine begins to whirr underneath the rest of the audio.]

Ilyaas: Cassian pulled me away from Rhia more and more as the days following the incident wore on. I didn't catch on, at first -- I thought it was an apology, a way to try and repair the gap that had formed from him calling for his mother when I'd disappeared -- the very person we'd silently agreed to roll our eyes at whenever she was acting ridiculous.

So I was happy to be pulled along -- because for as easy as it was with Rhia, it was safe with Cassian -- he could pull me onto the roofs in the middle of the night without fear of consequence -- which Rhia and I could no longer do, now that there was a lock on our window. We could roam the castle without

fear, without sneaking around, even when most of the castle was dead asleep and we were meant to be, too -- because as long as I was with him, there was purpose to our movement to everyone we disturbed, *a the soldier and king are on business, not a the eligida and menstrana de are doing something wrong.*

And -- I hated fighting with him. Hated the morning after the Eligidanim Traem where we sparred in stony silence, where he offered no apologies beating me and I thought, with that awful kind of angered satisfaction as I managed to hit him all of once -- hard, with the pommel of my sword -- *good.*

I watched the bruise swell on Rhia's cheek, and remembered Cassian's words -- *you haven't -- told my mother?*, and linked the act of violence to the expression he'd had. Linked the way Rhia refused to look into the queen's eyes -- and Cassian's, when he turned into a prince, not our *friend* -- to what he stood for.

I should've taken that, there. A hint, a clue. *The queen isn't all good. And you stand with her. And Cassian does what she says.*

But -- as the days passed, after that angry morning and afternoon in court where, like a child, *I hate this I hate this I hate this* raged in my head, I tried to let go -- I asked Rhia if she was alright and let her *of course* lift the burden of guilt from my heart, even though her response was forced. But

isn't that human nature? To ask a friend if they're alright while hoping the answer is yes, even if you know it's not true? Because then you can check it off your to-do list, then you can say *I've tried, I can't help someone that doesn't want me to* and move on. Conscience alleviated, emotional burdens avoided. *I'm fine. Okay.* And that makes me terrible in a thousand ways, tiny and large. I know it, I do.

But it was easier to let the anger shake off. It was easier to separate Cassian and the queen in my mind, was easier to say he couldn't have known -- because, to some degree, how could he have? He was a child with a role to play, just like I was, just like Rhia was. For whatever was said of prophecy, of us making the decisions, we'd yet to realize that. We'd assumed the adults knew better.

God, they didn't. Gods, they really didn't.

But it would take time. For us to figure that out.

[**FX:** The whirr of the cassette machine fades out. "Nightingales" once more fades in, just as cheerfully.]

Abigail, as the outro: Back Again, Back Again is written and produced by me, Abigail Eliza. If you'd like to hear more about the show, visit us on Twitter, Instagram, or Tumblr @backagainpodcast or on Tik Tok @abigailelizawrites. Our outro music is Nightingales by Pierce Murphy from the album To Japan,

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If you've made it this far, thanks for sticking around. You are important in this world and have a role no one else can fill. You are loved. I hope you have a wonderful day.